

HOUSE RESOLUTION 257

By Clemmons

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Eugene Arthur TeSelle, Jr., of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this legislative body were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Eugene Arthur TeSelle, Jr., an erudite scholar and professor of theology and religious studies, a minister and active force in the Presbyterian Church, a devoted community organizer, and a strong voice for justice and equality in all aspects of life; and

WHEREAS, the son of Eugene and Hildegarde TeSelle, Gene TeSelle was born in Ames, Iowa, on August 8, 1931; and

WHEREAS, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Colorado in 1952 and earned a Bachelor of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was awarded the Hodge Prize in Systematic Theology in 1954; and

WHEREAS, Dr. TeSelle served for three years as assistant minister of the First Presbyterian Church of East Orange, New Jersey, before leaving to pursue graduate studies at Yale University, from which he earned a Master of Arts and a Ph.D.; and

WHEREAS, he taught at Yale in the Department of Religious Studies for seven years (1962-1969) before accepting a position at Vanderbilt Divinity School, where he specialized in the history of Christian thought, church and state, science and religion, the churches and controversial public issues, and Central America and U.S. opinion; and

WHEREAS, Professor TeSelle enjoyed an illustrious career at Vanderbilt, teaching at the school for thirty years before taking a much-deserved retirement in 1999 as the Oberlin Alumni Professor of Church History and Theology, emeritus; and

WHEREAS, a vital force in the Vanderbilt community, he chaired the Graduate Department of Religion and several Divinity School and university committees and was president of the Faculty Senate in 1993-1994; Dr. TeSelle was honored with the Thomas Jefferson Award for service "in the councils of the university" in 1996; and

WHEREAS, Dr. TeSelle often said that in Nashville he had three quite distinct public roles, in addition to his private roles as husband and parent; and

WHEREAS, as a professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School, he taught a variety of courses in church history and theology and published a number of books on the history of Christian thought and Augustine, including *Augustinian Trajectories in Political Thought*, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith and Reason*, *Christ in Contest: Divine Purpose and Human Possibility*, *Augustine's Strategy as an Apologist*, and *Augustine the Theologian*; and

WHEREAS, he also researched little-known history on Peabody College being the original site for an African-American institution in the scholarly article "The Nashville Institute and Roger Williams University: Benevolence, Paternalism, and Black Consciousness, 1807-1910," which was published by the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*; and

WHEREAS, as a religious leader, he was a minister in the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and served on several national committees; Dr. TeSelle was an active member of the Witherspoon Society (now Presbyterian Voices for Justice), which was concerned with justice issues in church and society, serving as issues analyst and as president; and

WHEREAS, as a citizen, Gene TeSelle was a leader and organizer of various community projects, especially in neighborhoods and housing; he was one of the founders of the Nashville Neighborhood Alliance and Belmont-Hillsboro Neighbors, the longest continually operating neighborhood organization in Nashville, and served on the board of the Fair Housing Foundation of Nashville and as its liaison to the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice; and

WHEREAS, Dr. TeSelle also served on the boards of the Nashville Housing Fund and Affordable Housing Resources and was one of the founders of the statewide organization Tennessee Alliance for Progress; and

WHEREAS, he worked on a comprehensive integration plan for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools as a member of Concerned Citizens for Improved Schools and was an organizer of the Nashville Peace and Justice Center; and

WHEREAS, Dr. TeSelle's professional memberships included the Society for Values in Higher Education, the American Academy of Religion, the American Society of Church History, and the Society for Early Christian Studies; and

WHEREAS, during his retirement, he distinguished himself as the author of the largest number of signed articles in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* and was the principal writer of four neighborhood histories; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Gene TeSelle is survived by his wife, Penny Saunders TeSelle; sister, Ellen Boal, and her husband, Dean; children, Elizabeth R. TeSelle and John G. TeSelle and his wife, Maria; stepsons, William Peatman and his wife, Sue, James Peatman and his wife, Vivi, and Thomas Peatman and his wife, Jennifer; and nine grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Dr. TeSelle leaves behind an enduring legacy of accomplishment and public service as a scholar, educator, religious and community leader, and citizen; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor the memory of Eugene Arthur TeSelle, Jr., reflecting fondly upon his life of purpose and his commitment to living the examined life as a compassionate and humble Christian.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Dr. TeSelle.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.